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## Choosing Our Impact: A Conversation with Dr. Jane Goodall

# CHOOSING OUR IMPACT

A Conversation with  
Dr. Jane Goodall

CONDUCTED BY FRANCIS LEONG









## INTRODUCTION

This fall, Penn Sustainability Review's Managing Editor Francis Leong had the honor of speaking with Dr. Jane Goodall, noted anthropologist and expert on chimpanzees. The conversation ranged from Dr. Goodall's work in Gombe National Park in Tanzania with both chimpanzees and humans, sustainable land use, Dr. Goodall's program Roots & Shoots, problems of urbanization and Dr. Goodall's position as a role model for women in science.

Dr. Goodall is best known for her extensive field work with chimpanzees in the 1960s and her ground breaking primatology research. She obtained her PhD in ethology, the study of animal behavior, from Cambridge University. In 1977, Dr. Goodall started the Jane Goodall Institute, which works on projects ranging from conservation of chimpanzees and their habitat to environmental education to policy and advocacy.

In 1991, Dr. Goodall founded the Roots & Shoots program. This program aims to organize young people to learn about and develop projects related to environmental, conservation and humanitarian issues in their communities. Roots & Shoots started in Tanzania and now has chapters in 130 countries.

Currently, Dr. Goodall travels around the world, speaking, meeting with conservation leaders including many young people involved in Roots & Shoots, and speaking up for animal rights.

The following are selected excerpts from Francis' interview with Dr. Goodall.

**Francis Leong:** *Good afternoon and thank you so much for giving us some of your time to ask you some questions.*

*Some of your most famous work is in Gombe National Park, which is in close proximity to both wildlife and humans. Do you think it's possible, in the future, for humans and the environment to co-exist, where there's no destructive intermingling between the two?*

**Dr. Goodall:** Not if we carry on the way we are now, because we are rapidly destroying the environment. We are extracting natural resources at a faster rate than they can be replenished. So we have to change. I do think it's possible if we make the change, and if we make the change in time. That means a whole new mindset. The question is, are we capable of thinking in a new way or not?

What we're doing in Tanzania, in the villages around Gombe, is sustainable agriculture. And that's working. There used to be bare hills, they were cutting down all the trees in order to grow more food, and as they cut



down the trees, there was terrible soil erosion and the streams were silting up. It was a disaster. Then we introduced a new method, an older method of farming that is about restoring fertility to the land without using chemicals and pesticides. The trees came back, there were no more bare hills around Gombe, and the people have understood the importance of protecting the environment. Not just for chimpanzees, but for themselves.

For the rest of us, we have to get away from the model of modern agriculture, which is monoculture. Instead of working in a way that respects the land, we just try and grow more food by throwing chemical fertilizers into the soil.

It's using up the soil, killing all the natural bacteria in the soil, and creating dead soil. With our pesticides poisoning not only the pest insects, but also other insects and the birds that eat the insects, we are destroying the ecosystem. Then all the poison on the plants which we are consuming is probably responsible for illness, and all this being washed into the ocean is destroying the phytoplankton. It's very scary what we're doing to the planet today.

**Francis:** *Do you think it's possible for humans to sustainably source flora and fauna in the future? Or do you think that if we're to survive on this planet sustainably in the future we need to go to more high tech solutions such as clean greenhouses and even lab grown-meats and foods?*

**Dr. Goodall:** If we carry on the way we are, the outlook for the future is impossible. So we have to find alternative sources of energy. The thing is, the way the corporations work now, sustainable energy isn't being supported and there is emphasis put on fossil fuels.

Look at the way we're fracking, which is not only harming the land, but also polluting the water. We have to go

“**The question is, are we capable of thinking in a new way or not?**”

for clean, green energy and responsible living. When you buy something, think about how it was made and where it came from. Did it involve torture of animals? Did it involve child slave labor in a faraway country? How many miles has it traveled? Could you buy it closer to home? We all have to start thinking about our ecological footprints.

**Francis:** *You also mentioned in your TED Talk that you gave a couple of years ago, that there is this scenario in Tanzania where there's simply too many people for the land to hold. Do you think in the future, as our population continues to expand, we have to move more into cities to continue to make less impact over a larger area?*

**Dr. Goodall:** If the population continues to grow, we may as well give up. We have to have a point at which enough is enough. There are ways that we can support the population that's growing now. Cities can be greener and use up less land. Urban sprawl is destroying so many countries. Another thing that's really important is to turn to a plant based diet. The farming of so many millions of animals as more people eat meat is a problem. Forests are being cut down to supply the land for the grain to feed them, fossil fuels are used to get the grain to the animals, the animals to the abattoir, the meat to the table, and also animals produce methane gas which is a more virulent greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>. Also, bacteria are building up resistance to the antibiotics which have to be fed to these poor animals just to try and keep them alive, never mind whether they're sick or not. Turning to a plant based diet also means saving a lot of water.

**Francis:** *A lot of people are apathetic to a lot of the environmental and biodiversity problems going on. What do you think needs to happen in order to convince people that*

*our time is limited and we need to act relatively soon?*

**Dr. Goodall:** One of the big problems which leads to apathy in people is that they understand there are problems, but feel powerless to help. If you look at the problems besetting the planet today, as an individual, you are powerless. But the cumulative effect of everybody making the right choices in their daily lives will make a huge difference.

Our youth program, Roots & Shoots, is based on the fact that every individual has a role to play that matters. Every individual makes some kind of impact on the planet every day whether they want to or not, but we have a choice as to what kind of impact we're going to make. Every group chooses three projects, as a minimum, one to help people, one to help other animals and one to help the environment that we all share. We now have this program in almost a hundred countries. We have about 150,000 groups and members from kindergarten through university. One of my greatest reasons for hope is what these young people are doing.

If you have a group somewhere in the middle of Pennsylvania and you see that whatever it is you're doing is actually having an impact, and then you realize that groups like you all over the world are having the same kind of impact, then apathy goes away. There is a reason for hope rooted to all of our youth thinking about the problems, deciding what to do about them, rolling up their sleeves and taking action.

**Francis:** *I know as a female scientist you care a lot about encouraging young women to be educated both in Tanzania and also around the world. What cultural shifts have you seen that have encouraged more girls and women to enter specific fields?*

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**Dr. Goodall:** When I was growing up, what I did was impossible for girls to do, but in my family that was never discussed. My family had very strong women who had gone, in a way, ahead of others. Nobody was telling me, “Well, that's going to be tough for you because you're a girl.” So I just went ahead and did it. And then, of course, it depends exactly what you want to do as a young woman. There is bias against women, and it's harder for women to get jobs. They don't get paid as well. And that's all very discouraging, but I always advise young women to go ahead and follow their dream and not give up.

I've had hundreds of letters from women who said, “Thank you. Thank you. I did what you said. Now I'm this, that, or the other.” I haven't got any special advice, except, if this is something that a young woman wants to do, then follow your dream. Maybe you don't get there in a direct line. Maybe you have to go off, earn your living in some ways first, but then come back to your dream.

**Francis:** *A lot of our readers are college students and young people, and a big part about being a young person is dealing with failure. We'd like to ask you, what was one time that you thought you failed? And what did you end up learning from it?*

**Dr. Goodall:** When I first got to Gombe to start my field

Photos provided by the Jane Goodall Institute



study. I felt that I failed for at least four months because the chimpanzees were running away. And what I learned was patience, because in the end, I won through. Gradually, the chimps lost their fear and I was able to learn more and more about them. So I think that lesson was patience. You make mistakes and you should always learn from the mistakes. The most important thing is, if something goes wrong, sometimes you find it's the way you're thinking. And then you change.

So, you always have to be open, and listen to people. And sometimes, modify your behavior. It's terribly important to realize that the world isn't black and white; it's an aw-

ful lot of gray. And if you're moving towards some kind of goal, like abolishing the use of chimpanzees in medical research, it may be a long, long journey. During that journey, when I first started sitting down with the lab scientists, a lot of animal rights people refused to talk to me. They said, "How could you sit down at the table with them? How can you drink a cup of tea with them?" And I'm saying, "But if you don't talk to people, how do you ever expect them to change their minds?" The main message is, if you think you're right, and you really thought it all through, then you mustn't compromise your values.

*Francis: Thank you very much for your time, Dr. Goodall.*

